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**Singer of Tales: Story of a Baloch Minstrel
how he was Discovered in his Early Age as a Future Epic Singer**

In 1986 I was awarded a PhD scholarship by the State Scholarship Foundation, Government of Greece. It was a four year scholarship – one year for the Greek language and three years for research and writing the thesis. During the first year of my stay in Greece, I realized that Greece was not the ideal place for me to pursue my studies as I found very little interest among the academics there on any topic of my interest. I discussed this issue with my friends back in Balochistan who told me about the interest of Adriano Rossi and late Maurizio Tosi on Balochistan studies and suggested me to write to them. I wrote to both of them and they both responded to me very positively asking me to visit Naples and have a discussion with Prof. Rossi. In 1987 I came to see Prof. Rossi. He showed a great interest in my studies and assured me of any support if I wanted to come to Naples and work with him. I shifted to Naples the following year and started working on Balochi folklore and oral traditions under his guidance. Since then, he has worked as my mentor and teacher and has always helped me in all possible ways. I am honoured to contribute this biographical note of a Baloch minstrel for a volume dedicated to Adriano Rossi. I hope he accepts this small piece as a gesture of gratitude to him for his constant help and guidance during the years.

During the early 1990s, I spent a considerable time in Balochistan doing fieldwork for my PhD thesis on *pahlawān*¹ minstrelsy in Balochistan. As a

¹ *Pahlawān* is the term used for professional minstrels among the Baloch in the western and northern regions of Balochistan. The term is not encountered in the eastern dialects, i.e., the dialects spoken east of the Kalat plateau extending up to Sindh and Punjab where a large number of Baloch population is settled for about 500 or more years (for eastern Balochi dialects see Elfenbein 2009; for the latest on Balochi dialects in general see Jahani and Korn 2009: 636-38 and Korn 2005). The folk etymology of the term is explained as being composed of the Persian word

part of my research, I interviewed most of the living Baloch *pahlawāns*. Since minstrelsy was already a dying tradition, almost all of the living *pahlawāns* were in their 60s or above. The majority are now dead except for a few – among them is Mazār Ibrāhēm who is now very aged, sick and bedridden. I collected a wealth of information on Baloch minstrelsy tradition as well as on their socio-cultural role in the society. I have analyzed part of the material in my PhD thesis (Badalkhan 1994) but as the material was immense, I made use of only a small part of it. All my interviews were informative from my point of view but some were even more, remaining imprinted on my mind as if they had taken place only the other day. One such interview was with *pahlawān* Mazār Ibrāhēm whom I interviewed twice: once in 1991 in his hometown in Nalēṭ,² some 45 km east of Gwadar on the

pahlaw “hero, athlete” and Balochi suffix *-wān* “reader”, thus a *pahlaw-wān* being “the reader (singer) of heroic deeds”, “an epic singer” (Badalkhan 1994: 98, n. 6; Massoudieh 1364/1985:9) (*wān* [cf. Persian *khwān*] as a suffix is used in several other words as well, such as *kurānwān* [“reader/reciter of Quran”], *sadāwān* [“singer of *sadā* hymns” of Zikris], *baytwān* [“singer of *bayt* religious poems” of Zikris], and so on); but the word goes back to a Middle Iranian term indicating a Parthian and then a singer/poet (cf. Tafazzolī 1999; Minorsky and Elwell-Sutton 1986; Boyce 1957 and 2003 for *gōsān/kōsān*). A traditional *pahlawān* would only sing the *šayr* genre of verse narratives with the accompaniment of two types of stringed instruments: one or two *dambūrag* (a long necked stringed instrument with no frets when played in the accompaniment of a *pahlawān*) and one *surōz*, a bowed instrument. A professional *pahlawān* of some fame would never sing with the accompaniment of any other instrument nor he would sing short love songs, which they considered low in morality. However, now the tradition has changed as there are very few good listeners of classical *šayrs* with some background knowledge of *pahlawān* minstrelsy and the younger generation prefer short love lyrics. Some *pahlawāns*, while singing *šayr*, may sing some short love lyrics to attract the attention of the youth though it is a recent phenomenon unknown in the traditional *pahlawān* minstrelsy. Mazār admitted that he sings some *ghazal* (love lyrics) while singing *šayr* (verse narrative) in order to attract the younger generation who have the money and who throw cash on the singer as a mark of appreciation. “If I don’t sing love songs, youngsters leave the singing session and the older generation has no money to throw upon us”, he confided to me in Nalēṭ in 1991.

² My friend, Muhammad Akram Dashti, then the Minister of Information and Culture in Government of Balochistan and now a Senator, accompanied me to Nalēṭ. Very sincere thanks are due to him for his help and support. I must thank also Dr Taj Baloch who has been a great support to me, always available to organize music sessions, and interviews with minstrels and musicians whenever I have asked him for, or to accompany me to record musicians and singers during all these years of

Makran Coastal Highway, and again in 1997 at Bakhshi Hotel in Gwadar. The first interview was more personal and less ceremonial since it was me with my friend Akram Dashti, and Mazār with his close family members, all musicians and singers who were called from their work of repairing a mud-brick house. The second interview was conducted in a more informal way as it was not pre-arranged and we happened to see each other by chance while we had gathered at Bakhshi hotel for dinner. On this occasion, the participants were mostly my personal friends, local doctors, engineers, and other notables of the town who had joined us for the dinner. Here he seemed to be more motivated and tried his best to impress his élite listeners about the beginning of his career as a *pahlawān*. In both interviews, he recounted his early life experience with some minor differences but as human memory is not a written record imprinted on something, it is always possible to find some variations in different recordings. Here I am going to share what he recounted to me about how he was discovered as a future *pahlawān* by the headman of a town where he had been staying as a young boy along with other members of his extended family collecting dates during the annual date palms harvest (*āmēn*).

However, before proceeding with the main story, it should be said that *pahlawān* Mazār belongs to the Lūrī social group who are blacksmith and goldsmith by birth but also musicians, singers, artists and artisans.³ They are a dependent social class⁴ who have played a very vital role in Baloch society. Considered to be of Indian origin, they have been an indispensable and integral part of the Baloch throughout the known history, accompanying them from cradle to grave, offering their services at all occasions and in all circumstances: from religious and social festivities to the occasion of sickness and death.

As a dependent class, both men and women Lūrīs remained in the service of their patrons (*wāzdār*) all along their life and in return they were assured a sustenance, with which, most of them lived a far better life than

my involvement in folklore and folk music studies. In fact, the second interview took place thanks to him when he was the District Health Officer in district Gwadar and I was staying with him.

³ For a detailed discussion on the Lūrīs of Balochistan, see Badalkhan 2005; BDG, *Makran*, 1907: 107; Field 1959: 64-65; Adamec 1988: 282; Floor 1971, 2010.

⁴ Although the Lūrīs are considered low in the Balochi social scale, and treated as such, *pahlawāns* are highly esteemed and treated well. They are taken as the custodian of Baloch history and culture, and the depository of Baloch heritage and lore.

the majority of their common patrons.⁵ For example, Lūrī women assisted females in their patrons' family in wedding ceremonies doing all the work from inviting female guests to the cooking of food, preparing a bride for wedding, keeping her company for the first three or more days and so on. Similarly, a Lūrī woman was also the midwife, or an assistant to a midwife during a delivery, assisting a parturient woman and keeping her company for seven to 40 days, depending upon the social status of a family. She is also the singer, musician, dancer and entertainer in a gathering of women during a wedding or on other festive occasions. Music, singing and dancing being socially unapproved for a common Baloch, it is the Lūrī male and female to entertain their patrons at festive occasions – men to men and women Lūrīs to women participants as men and women usually celebrate separately. And, as all Lūrīs were family-wise related to some Baloch family,⁶ there was no way that any festivity went without music, singing and dancing. Similarly, male Lūrīs, on their part, were practically the machine of the society who ensured running of the social fabric with their day to day services and professional expertise.⁷ For example, it was the Lūrī who

⁵ Until a few decades back, when the Lūrī-wāzdār inter-dependency existed, the Lūrīs would receive a fixed share of products twice a year from land tillers – one following the summer harvest and one after the spring harvest – and relevant products from nomads. Besides, they would receive gifts and cash in wedding and circumcision ceremonies, on birth of a child, etc. Only on funerals they would offer their services for free as the patron family would be mourning and as an external component of the family, they would not expect or accept any compensation for their services (for more on this, see Badalkhan 2005: 35).

⁶ Green records that until the early 20th century each Baloch *sardār* had his separate standard, kettle drums, and bards (Green, *Selections of the Foreign Office*, No. XXXIV, p. 24; quoted in MacGregor 1875, III: 42; cf. also the interview of *pahlawān* Baššām in Faqīr Šād 2017c: 31).

⁷ Since the introduction of industrial tools and people's migration to larger towns and cities, and their little dependency on agriculture, the role of Lūrī has drastically diminished. Many families are still considered *wāzdār* of their hereditary Lūrīs but this has become more of a tradition than that of any dependency upon each other's services and support. Now, Lūrīs' services are only availed in wedding ceremonies in small villages when they play music, lead traditional group dances, assist in cooking and distributing food, and doing similar works both in bride's and groom's families. Since baby boys are now circumcised in hospitals, the bondage between the Lūrī, who was the only one to circumcise a boy in the past, and the

provided agricultural tools to agriculturalists, tools to nomads, and utensils and other necessary equipments for domestic use to the common people as factory made utensils were not easily available in interior Balochistan until the mid-20th century. Furthermore, it was the Lūrī who circumcised a baby boy with which this latter became his patron for the rest of his life. Any Baloch of any means was bound by tradition to provide with some economical support (called *rasmī*, “customary”, in Makran) to his family Lūrī. There were no exceptions that a common Baloch would deny his due share to his family Lūrī as all agriculturalists and nomads were bound through a client-patron relationship with some Lūrī family.

Besides their vital role in social events, the Lūrīs have also played a role similar to that of the modern Red Cross during armed conflicts in tribal areas. For example, during the inter and intra tribal wars in the past, the Lūrī would be a necessary component of the warring parties in their missions. Normally they would mend their weapons and armaments and provided them with water and food on the field but they would also provide them with the basic medical aid, removing the wounded men and dead bodies from the enemy lines and so on. Coming from the inferior social class, they were immune from any verbal or physical attack by the true blood Baloch (known as *aslzāt*). So, they could enter among the fighting body of armed men without a fear and remove the wounded and dead bodies. Other than this, it was the Lūrī who would lead a tribal *laškar* (group of armed men) beating drums in front of them announcing the arrival of a fighting force.⁸

boy circumcised, is no more there. Women also give birth in hospitals, or are assisted by qualified doctors and nurses at home, and this again has diminished the role of a Lūrī woman during a delivery and her assistance after that.

⁸ There are certain codes of conduct among the Baloch which are bounding even in present times. Besides not attacking people of low social class, religious minorities, women and children, *sayyids* (holy men claiming to have directly descended from the family of the Prophet Muhammad), a *mullāh* holding a Quran, etc., they would also not attack the enemy without a prior warning or from the back. A tribal encounter was always to be announced in advance and the place and timings communicated. The enemy was spared when they retreated or raised their hands in surrender. If women entered the lines of fighting and removed their head scarves supplicating the end of an encounter, the fighting would be immediately stopped. Usually, women would not intervene to stop a fight as it would be taken as a show of cowardice from the part of their men. They would, on the contrary, incite their men to fight bravely and die in the field rather than finding a way to

The Lūrīs are strictly endogamous. I have not heard of any cases of a mix marriage outside their own social group.⁹ Within their own community, they are closely inter-connected to each other and very often take wives from their blood brothers living some distant corners of Balochistan or even on the either side of the international borders between Iran and Pakistan. In fact, one wife of *pahlawān* Mazār is from Iranian Balochistan where he goes very often. Some Lūrī families may have *wāzdār* on either side of the international borders and they regularly visit them and offer their services without any problem.

Baloch Lūrīs are believed to be close akin to the wider group of Gypsies now spread from South Asia to the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe and elsewhere.¹⁰ Although known by different names in this wide area, they appear to have retained their ancestral profession of working on iron, copper and gold, music making, singing, dancing and entertaining the folk everywhere they have gone.¹¹ It is generally agreed that all these have

run away from it. But, when the women did intervene, the fight would be stopped as women are considered the symbol of collective honour and no one would imagine of dishonouring himself by sending back the women supplicating the end of a conflict, or even worse, harming them either physically or verbally (cf. also Dames 1981: 339, who observed the Baloch faithfulness to his code of honour in which women and children are never injured in tribal raids).

⁹ As a matter of fact, they are very conscious about the purity of their blood and proud of their distinct identity and status. They sometime even consider themselves superior to the other low social classes in Balochistan and do not take wife or give their daughters in marriage to them.

¹⁰ On their part, they consider themselves a part and parcel of the Baloch and do not agree that they come from outside Balochistan. As to the origin of their name, they explain it as having come from the Balochi word *lōr* (“mix up”). Being mixed up (*lōr*) with their Baloch patrons in all social occasions, and having a share in their food products, they maintain that they have been given the name Lūrī/Lōrī (“those who are always mixed up [with the Baloch]”). They call themselves by different names, such as Sarmastānī, Dāūdī, and so on (for more on this see Bray 1913, I: 129 ff.).

¹¹ There are a number of behavioural similarities between Baloch Lūrīs and European Gypsies. Top of this could be mentioned as both live a happy and easy going life. They are famous for having a taste for good food (*waššnukk*) and being spendthrift. There exist no concept of savings among them. They spend whatever they earn, and very often they earn a lot of money during wedding ceremonies but spend them immediately – some say because it is easy money earned by beating a few drums and earning a lot, they don’t worry how it goes. Many of them are ha-

their ancestral homeland somewhere in the Indian subcontinent.¹² When exactly they began their westward migration out of India is hard to determine but some 10th–12th century sources record of the Luri musicians being sent by a king of India by the name of Shangal/Shankal, in considerable numbers to Iran on the request of the Sassanian king, Bahrām Gūr (r. 420–438 CE). Both Hamza of Isfahan (d. 961 CE), a Persian philologist and historian who completed his *Chronology* in 961 CE (Rosenthal 1986: 156), and Abul Qasim Ferdowsi (935–1020 CE), who completed his *Shahnameh* in 1010 CE, relate that one day Bahram Gūr observed that his subjects drank wine without music. He felt sorry for them and asked the king of India to send musicians to Iran so that they made music for them. The king sent 12,000 people (according to Hamza), or 10,000 (according to Ferdowsi). Hamza calls them ancestors of the later Zott (Jatt) while Ferdowsi calls them Luri (see Badalkhan 2005: 17 for references). The same episode is also recorded in the *Mojmal al-tawārīkh* (12th century) where they are called *kousan* (*kō-sān/gōsān*), “le mot pehlewī pour designer un musicien”, and are 12,000 in number, comprising men and women (Mohl 1841: 515; see Boyce 1957 and 2003 for *gōsān/kōsān*). *Mojmal al-tawārīkh* calls them the ancestors of later *Louris* (Mohl 1841: 515). It is generally held that they then multiplied and spread to different countries and continents. In much of Europe and Central Asia, they are now known by the generic term of Gypsy, “an umbrella term reflecting the common origins and underlying unity of the heterogeneous communities whose ancestors migrated from the Indian subcontinent” (Marushiakova and Popov 2016: 2; cf. also Matras 2004).

Although there were *pahlawāns* with other low social backgrounds as well, it was from the Lūrīs that the Baloch epic singers traditionally came.¹³

bitual gamblers and are famous for other frivolous activities. In the past they would be famous in selling and buying donkeys and horses (but never camels which are the beasts of Baloch nomads) and now in the business of selling and buying of watches, radios, etc. As for their women, they are far more liberal than their true blood Baloch sisters. Women seclusion or covering of their faces with veil is almost unknown among them, except for some isolated and exceptional cases, especially with the womenfolk of goldsmiths.

¹² For more on this see Minorsky 1931: 285–288; Walker 1995: 138; Badalkhan 2005; Marushiakova and Popov 2016: 24–25.

¹³ Some *pahlawāns* also came from other inferior social classes (cf. the interviews of *pahlawān* Baššām in Faqīr Šād 2017c: 30–31 and *pahlawān* Qādirdād Qāduk in Faqīr Šād 2017b: 8) but it was the Lūrī who provided the bulk of the professional *pahla-*

In fact, even today, when the profession of *šayr* singing is adopted by some Baloch from the upper social background (*aslzāt*),¹⁴ they disapprove of being called *pahlawān*, a term denoting the professional and hereditary epic singers from the low social classes, especially from the Lūrī and Rōmb¹⁵ backgrounds. Epic singers from the true blood Baloch background call themselves *šāir* (the Arabic word for “poet”, also used in Balochi with the same meaning) and use the term *šaurā* (Ar. pl. of *šāir*) for poets.¹⁶

wāns (in Eastern dialect areas, epic singers were almost exclusively Lūrī but here the term Rōmb/Ḍomb is applied as an occupational term “to a Lūrī who goes in for minstrelsy and work connected with domestic ceremonies like births and marriages”, Bray 1913, I: 140). However, Barker and Mengal mention of a different use of the term *pahlawān* in the northern Rakhshani dialect area. They write: “The /paləvan/ ‘bard, singer of epic poetry’ usually restricts himself to the singing of /dəptər/ ‘epic-poem[s].’ He is normally a member of one of the ‘noble’ tribes i.e. one of those tribes considered aristocratic by Baluchi traditional society), and his profession is thus respected one. The /paləvan/ only sings; he does not usually play any instrument” (Barker and Mengal 1969, I: 319-20). My personal experience from a short visit to that region, on the other hand, was that the term *pahlawān* was used for all *šayr* singers coming from any social background and not limited to those from the “noble” tribes only. I believe that the term was, as in Makran, basically limited to the low social class professional minstrels which has now extended to the performers of epics from other social classes as well.

¹⁴ The dependent social groups were traditionally not considered as pure blood Baloch (*aslzāt* “of pure breed”). Historically, they did not own land or engaged in pastoral nomadism, professions reserved for the true blood Baloch. With the introduction of market economy and free labour, education, and with different government and non-government employment opportunities, the situation has changed and now there is no or very little difference between the patron and once client/dependent social classes. In the past, only those Baloch who could trace their origins to some original Baloch tribes were considered to be true blood Baloch while the dependent social classes were considered *kamzāt* (of lower breed).

¹⁵ Both are same or related groups. Pehrson (1966: 30) observes that “Loris (Gypsies, smiths) and Dombs (musicians) are categories not very readily distinguishable from each other but clearly distinct from other groups”. And Dames (1904:17) writes that “the Loris are the same as the Doms, the hereditary minstrels of Indian origin, known in Persia and Balochistan under the name Lori, or Luri” (cf. also Barker and Mengal 1969, I: 320; vol. II: 505; Bray 1913, I: 130; Hetu Ram & Douie 1898: 60, n. 3; Badalkhan 1994: 130).

¹⁶ In fact, when I interviewed the famous *pahlawān* Mahmād-i Haibitān in Buraimi in the Sultanate of Oman in 1989, he claimed he was a *šāir*. He explained to me that *pahlawāns* were epic singers from the Lūrī background and since he was not a Lūrī,

Pahlawān Mazār belongs to the Dāūdī branch of the Lūrīs. The Dāūdīs claim that they descend from the biblical Prophet David (Hazrat Dāūd of Muslims), who was born about 1040 and died in 970 BCE). Hazrat Dāūd, according to the Muslim popular tradition, was the best singer ever existed on earth.¹⁷ Now in his 80s, Mazār has spent all his life singing epic songs and verse narratives until late 1980s when the demand of his listeners shifted from epic songs to short love lyrics. Now, succeeded by the younger generation of popular singers, many from among his immediate family members, he laments that he is no more listened to by the youth of his people and is no more invited for singing sessions.¹⁸

he could not be called a *pahlawān*. Hōt Šahdād, Mullā Kamālān and Sāleh Mahmad Gōrgēj also insisted that they were *šāir* and not *pahlawān*, while *pahlawān* Baššām and *pahlawān* Mazār, two of the great masters of *šayr* singing, admitted to me during different interviews that they were *pahlawān* and not *šāir* since they did not compose poems but sang the one already composed by others. The same was maintained by *pahlawān* Qādirād Qāduk to Faqīr Šād (2017b: 2-3) saying that anybody who adopts the profession of *šayr* singing is called *pahlawān*. Alī Mahmad Sādābādī (Badalkhan 1994: 240) also explained to me that *pahlawāns* are those who take hold of a *dambūrag*, go around from place to place and sing for the people for a living. *Pahlawān* Mazār explained to me that since the people in modern times do not give much respect and consideration to *pahlawāns*, they try to not call themselves as such.

¹⁷ According to Imam Gazzali (1963, II: 205) a hadith “praised the Prophet David by saying: David used to sing with so melodious sound that men, jinn, beasts and birds gathered together spell bound to hear it. Nearly four hundred persons expired thus by hearing his songs”. Ubaid ibn Umair al-Laithi (a story-teller in al-Medina at the time of the Prophet) relates that David the Prophet had a cithara (*mi`zafa*) on which he would play when he read the psalms, in order that the *jinn*, and men, and birds might gather to him (cited in Farmer 1941, ii: 131, nn. 4-5). Another tradition says that at midnights, the strings of his harp, made from the entrails of the ram that Abraham had sacrificed on Mount Moriah in place of Isaac, vibrated, and at that sound he awakened and began to study Torah (Montgomery n.d.:455). The Dards of northern Pakistan, on the other hand, believe that Prophet David played only Jew’s harp. They maintain that all other music should be avoided by good Muslims except for the Jew’s harp, playing which is meritorious since it was the instrument played by King David (Leitner 1889: 35; for the musical life of David in the Old Testament see Kohlbenberger 1980, II: 201-202; Douglas et al. 1987: 987 ff.).

¹⁸ The “Balochi Music Promoters’ Society” (*Sāz o zēmīlī dīwān*), a volunteer body formed by a group of young educated Baloch in 2018, organized a musical concert in Gwadar on March 8, 2019 to honour Mazār Ibrāhēm for his life-long services to Balochi music and culture. The concert was attended by a very large number of

Like any Baloch of a certain age and worth of its salt, Mazār remembered names of seven generations of his forefathers (*apt pušt yāt int*), and he mentioned them to me one by one. As for his exact age, he did not know how old he was as the birth and death recording did not exist in Balochistan of his times. He believed that he could be around 52 in 1991. About owning any landed property, he confided to me that his paternal ancestors did not possess any but his maternal ancestors did some. Answering to my question about his family profession, he said his ancestors had been engaged in different professions but their ancestral profession is that of goldsmith:¹⁹ “some of my ancestors had also learnt some reading and writing and worked as *pēšimām* (prayer callers) in some local mosques”. About the languages he knows, he said he does not know any language other than Balochi but a very little Persian to the level of singing some Persian poems and a little bit of Urdu. About his marriages and children, he said he has three wives – two from Pakistani Balochistan and one from the Iranian side – and 12 children (seven sons and five daughters). He has three brothers and one sister. Among the brothers, the eldest one works in the village of Kunčitī (in Dašt) as an ironsmith; another brother is a musician and singer; one brother earns a living as a fisherman (a profession adopted out of necessity to earn a living); and one is a *surōz* player – one of the best in the area. He told me that all male members of his family play *dambūrag* and some other instrument, adding that the best and most famous musicians of the whole area are from his family: one nephew plays *benjō*, who is the son of his *surōzī* (*surōz* player) brother; another nephew plays drums (*tabla*), one nephew plays *surōz*, one brother plays harmonium and also sings love lyrics (*qazal* and *sot*) and so on. Since every house of his family members has some musical instrument hanging somewhere, children learn handling and playing them before they begin speaking or walking, he told me.

During the interviews, he told me about the minstrelsy tradition in Makran and the past *pahlawān* masters but also how he was discovered as a

people, mostly young educated people coming from all over Balochistan. Several *pahlawāns* from the Iranian and Pakistani sides performed for a spellbound audience and it continued almost a whole night. I watched much of it live through social media and was startled seeing youth keeping their mobile phones aside and listening with great attention and admiration to the performing *pahlawāns*.

¹⁹ Both goldsmiths and blacksmiths in Balochistan come from the Lūrī background but the former have a more prestigious position in society than their latter blood brothers.

future singer in his tender age by a village chief where he had been staying as a seasonal date-collector along with his extended family. He recounted to me that during the *āmēn* (date palms harvest season) his family would regularly move to Turbat to collect dates.²⁰ In Kēč (old name of Turbat), he, with a number of his cousins and brothers, would sleep on a *kāpar*²¹ during the nights. Kēč was infested with mosquitoes during summer so they would spend a good part of the night fighting them. In one such night, he started singing some *zahīrōk*²² to engage his companions and pass the time. He recounted: “Soon after I started singing, people from all around came to listen to me. This news reached to the local chief, *Kahdā*²³ Asā, who then collected information about me and my family background. Once he was informed who I was, he had told the people that ‘this *pahlawān* is our own *pahlawān*’ (*ē pahlawān may watī pahlawān int*). He then sent a person and called me there”.

The headman, as the guardian of Baloch traditions, organized a special dinner and, besides the elders of the neighbourhood, invited him and his companions who were all his brothers and cousins. He made them sit in

²⁰ He told me that during the *āmēn* season whole villages would be emptied. People would move to *šahristāns* (settlements [along the Kēč Valley] with perennial irrigation system, date palm groves and seasonal crops) and stayed there till the end of *āmēn*.

In the district of Kēč, this would be the case with the people from Kōlwāh and Bālgitar on the east to Dašt on the west, as I can attest it through my personal experience until the 1970s. Only the fishermen on the coastal towns would not move to the towns with oasis as fishing would provide them real means for their survival. The situation drastically changed with the discovery of labour work in the Arabian Gulf and the economic uplift that was brought with the migration of the labour force to the Gulf countries and the recruitment in the Sultanate of Oman army.

²¹ There are two types of *kāpar*. One is a thatched structure raised above the ground and used as a bedding stand. Usually four pillars, either of wood or bricks, are erected upon which tree branches, mats, rugs, mattresses, etc. are spread and families sleep there during summer nights. There exist another type of *kāpar* which is a tent shape big structure used as a shade during the day time.

²² Couplets sung in very sophisticated and elaborated melisma (for more on *zahīrōk*, see Badalkhan 2009).

²³ *Kahdā* is a hereditary title used for a village chief. It is limited to the Baloch in eastern and western Makran where there is no tribal set up.

their company and eat with them²⁴ as a mark of recognition to his importance to the society and his role in preserving and transmitting the ancient wisdom of his people, which was still preserved and transmitted through the word of mouth with written word playing no role at all. His companions, all young boys, were like nobody a day earlier offering their services as day labourers at date palms harvest, or going from one farmer to the other collecting dates as alms, were now seated in the company of the headman and other elders, enjoying a good meal. And above all, they were no more nobody, but family members and companions of a future *pahlawān*, the future custodian of the past glory of the nation without whom their patrons would have no past and no means to pass it over to the coming generations. After the meal, a *dīwān* (gathering) was arranged where the future *pahlawān* made his first debut in singing his first *šayr* in front of a selected audience. The gathering was specially organized at the guest-house of the headman where elders of the town were invited.²⁵ He said he had memorised only four or five *šayrs* by then. As for the musical accompaniment, some local musicians were invited to play for the boy.

Once the future *pahlawān* was invited to perform in the gathering of village elders, his first test was to prove that he was worthy of their expectations. This he did in the selection of an appropriate poem to demonstrate that even at that tender age he knew what to present in the presence of

²⁴ In the traditional Baloch society, *Lūrīs* would not eat with their masters. However, now the situation is changed and no such discrimination is normally observed.

²⁵ The above statement is from his Gwadar interview. In his 1991 Nalēṅṅ interview, he recounted a somewhat different version about his first experience of singing in public. Here he told me that at the age of 12 or 13 he used to work as a *bīrī* (tobacco folded in betel leaves and smoke as cigarettes) maker in Gwadar. During the day time he would work at the workshop and during the night he would go to a local teashop and sing. He said a *pahlawān* by the name of Umar was very famous in Makran those days. One night Umar was invited for a wedding ceremony and he had also gone to listen to him. He said he asked *pahlawān* Umar if he could sing a *šayr*. Umar allowed him. By then he had memorised only a single *šayr* from an old lady which he sang in that gathering. People liked his melodious voice and singing style very much and he received 12 Rupees from the audience “which was a great money in those days”, he added. The poem he sang was the same he said he had sung in Turbat in the assembly of elders. In his Nalēṅṅ interview he also told me about his performance at Kahdā Asā’s place but he did not say that it was his first experience of performing in public.

who. This aspect of an epic singer is very important in Baloch society as another famous epic singer, *pahlawān* Baššām, who died at the age of 65²⁶ in September 2011, once told me during an interview in Ball Nigwar (district Kēč) that the way one observes the status of a person in a banquet and then places an appropriate *wān* (plate/course of food) in front of him, *pahlawāns* do the same: “We first observe the audience and individuals present there and then choose appropriate poems to sing for them, as well as whether to perform them in full, embellishing them with frequent repetitions,²⁷ explanations, comments and *čihāls*²⁸ (melisma) or just to kill the time and fool the audience”. So, our boy singer was aware of the fact that in order to pass the test, he had to select an episode recounting the glorious past of the Baloch and heroic deeds of their past heroes. And he chose a poem from the 15th–16th century epic cycle of the Chakarian period.²⁹ In this episode, Mir Čākar, then the ruler of Balochistan, tells his nephew, Mīr Bībagr, who, according to the oral tradition, later became the commander-in-chief of his forces, about a young beautiful girl he had seen in the palace of a ruler of a neighboring country. He tells him that the girl is beautiful beyond any imaginations and worthy of only a Baloch house. Mīr Bībagr learns further that his uncle is talking about the daughter of the governor/ruler of Kandahar.³⁰

The boy singer chose the ballad narrating the story of Mīr Bībagr (also called Bībarg and Bīvragh in different dialects) because he knew that Bībagr was the most famous and undisputed character from the Baloch heroic age. His is a proverbial character and very often quoted by the Baloch of modern times for his sagacity and multi-character personality. Besides being the nephew of Mīr Čākar Rind, the Baloch Alexander the Great, their

²⁶ In 1989 he told me in Ball Nigwar that he was about 43 or 44 years old, and Faqīr Šād (2017c: 1) quotes his son having said that his father had died at the age of 65.

²⁷ Repetition is very much important in Balochi *šayr* performance. An experienced *pahlawān* with a good voice may sing different verses in different modes repeating them several times in different melodies before passing on to the following episode or verses (for more on this see Badalkhan 1994).

²⁸ *Čihāl* is a highly melismatic and expressive way of singing. It is sung either to a line of poetry or on a single vowel or several vocables (cf. Badalkhan 2009: 233–34).

²⁹ See Baluch 1977: 70 ff. for the Chakarian period.

³⁰ For the episode in Balochi classical literature, see Dames 1906, I: 148 ff.; Baluch 1977: 130 ff.; Nasīr 1979:229 ff; Marī 1987: 172–232; Marī 2009: 96–139; Sābir 1996: 90–116.

“national hero, the Grettir, the Sigurd, the King Arthur” (Oliver 1890: 31), Bībagr himself was a person of unmatched qualities. Not only the Balochi classical literature is filled with his praises but modern Baloch scholarship is also unanimous in paying great tributes to him. H. Marī (1987: 172) calls him the full moon of the 14th of lunar month in the Baloch sky, and many Baloch writers maintain that it is with him that romanticism in Balochi literature begins.³¹

The young singer was aware of the fact that singing a poem on the past glories of the Baloch was to glorify the Baloch of all times, and a good card to play before his audience who could become a permanent source of income and support for him for the rest of his life.³² So he sang the poem about Mīr Bībagr’s love affair with the Arghun princess, Grānāz, “the daughter of Shujā-ud-Dīn Zunnūn, the viceroy of Kandahār province on behalf of his sovereign, Mirzā Shāh Hussain of Herāt (d. 1506 A.D.)” (Baluch 1977: 131; cf. Dames 1906, I: 48). The poem narrates that Mīr Bībagr followed the advice of his uncle, went to Kandahar, got involved in a love affair with the princess and eloped her to Balochistan. Although there are no written records of this having taken place, Balochi oral tradition claims that this had really taken place and there are a number of ballads and legends to support this claim. Dames even quotes from the prevalent tradition that “Bivaragh had a son named Gishkhaur by his marriage with the King of Qandahar’s daughter, who is the ancestor of the Gishkhauri tribe” (Dames 1906, I: 48). Baluch, who was also the Chief of the Gīškaorī tribe,

³¹ For more on Bībagr, Nasīr 1979: 229; Sābir 1996: 90; S. M. Marī 2009: 119 ff.; Badalkhan, forthcoming.

³² One thing regarding the first poem ever sung by a *pahlawān* before an audience is very important in Balochi epic singing tradition. Most of the *pahlawāns* I have interviewed so far, related to me that they had started their career by singing a poem from the Rind and Lāšār period or from another epic cycle of the classical period (see Baluch 1977, chap. III and IV for the classical period of Balochi poetry). For example, Mahmād-i Haibitān (Badalkhan 1994: 226) claimed that the first poem he had started his career with was about the original homeland of the Baloch in Halab (generally taken for Aleppo in Syria but there are also other interpretations for this toponym; see Badalkhan 2013 for a detailed discussion). *Pahlawān* Baššām and *pahlawān* Mullā Sāleh told me that they had started their career by singing poems from the Šay Murīd and Hānī cycle, and so on (Badalkhan 1989-1991, unpublished MSS and audio recordings containing interviews with *pahlawāns*; see also the interviews of Mahmād-i Haibitān, Qādirād Qāduk and *pahlawāns* Baššām in Faqīr Šād 2017a,b,c).

reports of this story as if an authentic one but maintains that “unfortunately, from her blood, Bīvragh did not raise up any child who should have served Baluch people with Arghūn pride and Baluch power” (1977: 135). And I believe that Baluch’s thesis is more convincing as the tribal name “Gīškaorī” seems to have its origin from the Gīškaor (cf. also Dames 1904: 19, 59-60), name of a stream (Kīškaor) in western Makran and one in district Kēč in eastern Makran³³ where a tribeless nomadic people by the name of Gīškaorī³⁴ live. Anyway, the poem the young *pahlawān* sang at the gathering of notables began as such:

*Dūšī manā mīrēn Čākarā gwašta
ki man janikk āhū drōšumēn dīsta
nay ki hamā kullān int Balōčīgān
gwātgir o darbandān tanakkēnān
man dar o darbandān hasārēnān.*

Last night I was told by Mīr Čākar:
“I have seen a gazelle like girl, (but)
She is not in the houses of Baloch,
Neither in the houses with thin balconies and loose entrances,
She is in the palaces with fortified gates”.

Mazār went on with his narration that his first performance was a great success. Although he did not know many poems and made mistakes while singing certain parts of these, his voice was sweet and melodious so his performance was highly appreciated. He had proved himself worthy of his family name and that of the ancestral profession.³⁵ His audience suggested

³³ Gīškaor is also the name of an area with a settlement of the same name in Kōl-wāh valley.

³⁴ While the Gīškaorī is a powerful tribe in eastern Balochistan (Quddus 1990: 98; Tolbort 1871: 20), in district Kēč it is not. Here they are simply called as such because of their residing along the Gīškaor river. They live on fishing in the river pools and by selling wood for fuel as well as products of dwarf palm (*pīšš*), such as mats, baskets, ropes, etc. to the settled population in neighbouring towns and villages. In the last few decades, river pools have been drying up due to the lack of seasonal rains and the majority of Gīškaorīs have been settling down in and around the town of Sāmī, some 30 km east of Turbat.

³⁵ It has not been the case with all but the majority of the 20th century Baloch *pahlawāns* have learnt the art of singing from their family elders. Take for example the case of Qadirdad Qāduk (Faqīr Šād 2017b), *pahlawān* Baššām (interview with

him to attend a senior *pahlawān* in order to memorize more poems, learn musical modes and master the art of minstrelsy.

He continued with his narration saying that soon after his first rebut at the Chief's place there was a wedding ceremony of the sons of a certain Pullān who worked as a barber in Turbat. He invited him to perform for the ceremony. By then he had memorized only four or five *šayrs*. A very large number of people had gathered to listen to him.³⁶ He performed there for four full nights repeating the same *šayrs* every night as he did not know any other.³⁷

Now that the young boy had passed the first test and was introduced as a future *pahlawān* to an audience of elders and influential individuals at the chief's place, followed by the wedding ceremony of Pullān's sons, his next move was to find some senior *pahlawān* with a rich repertoire to memorize as many *šayrs* as possible in order to be able to engage a gathering at least for one to three full nights in the initial stage and then up to seven or more nights when he was grown up enough to be called a full-fledged *pahlawān*. Furthermore, he would also be invited to sing in competition with other singers where each one would play the role of a rival hero or sing one episode from a famous epic cycle in turn. In such occasions, he would be expected to know the rejoinder of each and every poem or episode and this would go on for whole nights, or even for several nights.³⁸ Besides, if per-

Badalkhan in 1991 and Faqīr Šād 2017c); *pahlawān* Mahmād-i Haibitān (Badalkhan 1994, appendix 1.2 and Faqīr Šād 2017a), and so on.

³⁶ Until the 1960s, the audience of an epic singing session comprised of both men and women. These latter used to attend a session the whole night, Mazār told me. It was after the arrival of a large number of non-Baloch migrant workers, government servants and the security forces from other parts of Pakistan that women were confined to their homes in major towns and, little by little, this trend then extended to smaller settlements but it was not until the late 20th century that the epic singing audience became an all men affair.

³⁷ Answering one of my questions about his current repertoire, he said that he can sing for four full nights without repeating any *šayr* or episode twice.

³⁸ *Pahlawān* Baššām narrates of an interesting episode of a singing competition between two famous *pahlawāns* of the 20th century. He recounts that once a certain *pahlawān* Maksūd from Pīššukān (tehsil Gwadar) decided to visit Sardār Sayad Khān, a local chief in western Makran, and get some gifts from him. He went there. Sardār Sayad Khān killed a goat to feast the visit of the *pahlawān*. After dinner and following the evening prayers, the Sardār asked him to perform some *šayr* for his folk. Maksūd replied that he had come for that purpose. Sardār then invited his

forming all alone, people would ask him to sing specific *šayrs* and he would be expected to know all major episodes from the most famous epic cycles to satisfy the demand of his audience. A successful *pahlawān* would be the one who would never fail to sing a rejoinder or a poem on demand. So, the young boy was to keep all this in mind and find a proper teacher with a rich repertoire to take him as his student and help him memorize episode after episode from epic cycles and poem after poem. Making this the mission of his life, he waited until the end of the date harvest and soon after that went to take studentship at a senior *pahlawān*. The teacher he chose was named Mahmud Hāšum, a famous *pahlawān* from Kallag Kulānč in *tehsil* Pasni. Hāšum, according to our *pahlawān*, had an exceptionally rich repertoire and was also a great master of minstrelsy tradition. He stayed with him for full six months.

During his studentship, he would follow his teacher during live performances in order to master the art of musical accompaniment in singing of an epic – a basic component for a good performance. For example, an epic song was often compared to a hilly dirt road by several of my *pahlawān* informants. They often explained to me that as a (dirt) road passes through hilly areas and valleys, having bends, ascents and descents, and the way a driver has to change the speed and gear adopting one for every type of road, so is the singing of an epic. There are dialogues, war scenes, message deliveries, weddings and mourning, praises of a horse, of an armour, one's

family *pahlawān*, Hājī Abdul Rahīm, telling him that a *pahlawān* from Gwadar had arrived so they had to perform some *šayr* for them. In the beginning of the performance, Maksūd had asked Abdul Rahīm to lead the session as he was older in age. They started singing in rejoinder. One *šayr* was sung by Abdul Rahīm and its rejoinder was sung by Maksūd, and this went on for a good part of the night. Whether it was from (the epic cycle of) Čākar and Gwahrām, from that of Bālāč and Dōdā (epic cycle) or from Hammal-i Jānd (epic cycle), Maksūd had not failed to sing the rejoinder. Now, Abdul Rahīm, being the family *pahlawān* of the Sardār, and performing in the hometown of his patron, thought of a trick to save his face. He started singing a poem by Mullā Qāsum Rind (a 19th century poet from Mand in eastern Makran) on the relations between wife and husband. Maksūd had realized that this poem was not from an epic cycle and, as such, did not have a rejoinder. He started singing a poem not related to the poem of Abdul Rahīm. This latter told the Sardār that Maksūd had failed to sing the rejoinder of his poem. The Sardār had immediately silenced him by saying that his poem was without a rejoinder. "You are equal and no one is inferior to the other", Sardār Sayad Khān told him (Faqīr Šād 2017c: 31-33).

country, or a family background, etc., and for each of these scenes and episodes, the singer has to adopt a different singing style so that the listeners feel the difference between a war scene to that of a celebration, or from a message delivery to a rejoinder, etc.³⁹ In the Makran school of epic performance, which is the most elaborated and sophisticated style in all over Balochistan, there are particular *čihāl* and *zahīrōk* for particular scenes so a *pahlawān* needs to learn all these by heart. As the older generation was expert of these styles and musical modes, they would not tolerate a singer singing them wrong. Mazār told me that the test ground for a *pahlawān* from Makran was Koškalāt in Turbat. The people of Koškalāt were great connoisseurs of *pahlawān* minstrelsy and singing techniques, and were very harsh and intolerant with those who were not up to their expectations. Although the male population of the whole town was known for their love for classical singing and their expertise in this field, there were certain individuals who were far-famed experts of Balochi classical music and singing. Very often, they would be invited especially by the people to give a check to a performing *pahlawān* so that he did not make mistakes either in the singing of verses or with the music for different parts of an epic. Faqīr

³⁹ On one occasion, Faqīr Šahdōst, a famous *pahlawān* from Nushki, compared an epic to a train. He told me that the way a train departs from Quetta for Karachi or Peshawar, or for some other destination, and the way it stops at different stations, fills water, oil, some passengers get off and others get on, so is an epic (*dāstānī šayr*). It has different episodes and stages but the final destination is the same. On another occasion, he compared the performance of an epic to a passing train: once it departs, it does not stop for anyone. This he told me when I was recording him in Nushki and I realized that my cassette had come to an end. I tried to stop him so that I could change the cassette but he did not listen to me and continued with his performance with closed eyes and ears stuffed with his forefingers. When he finished the poem, I asked him to recite it again because I had failed to record it to the full. He replied me that the train had gone and I had to wait for the next train, i.e., for another session and another time. He told me that the poem had flown out of his mind and he could not bring it back at that very moment. We had to wait for another occasion to have it back.

I observed there how aged people were interested in classical epic performance. This I realized when at one point late in the night I looked outside from one of the windows and noted that a large number of men and women had gathered on the backside of the house and listening spellbound to Faqīr.

That session was organized for me by my host, Shabir Ahmad Badini. Very sincere thanks are due to him.

Šād mentions of a person by the name of Dōstā son of Dihkān Maksūd from Turbat. His knowledge in this field was exceptionally great and he was so harsh and intolerant with those who made mistakes that he would be a compulsory component of any performance in and around Turbat. Other famous names from Turbat included Šāhī, Dilmurād and Daryāi. It was because of such experts and harsh critics that no amateur *pahlawān* could ever perform in Turbat, writes Faqīr Šād (2017c: 11). And Mazār was looking forward to have a chance to perform in Koshkalat to see if he had mastered the art of minstrelsy or not.

Mazār spent six full months, day and night, with his teacher memorizing poems and mastering the art of musical accompaniment.⁴⁰ During the day time, he would help his teacher doing day to day chores and during the night time, the teacher would recite poems, episode after episode, and the student would repeat them until every single word and line was literally memorized to him.⁴¹ As there were no voice recorders in those times, and both he and his teacher were illiterate, they would rely only on the repetition of verse after verse for the transmission of these poems. In the meantime, when there were invitations for a public performance, and there would be one almost every weekend, the apprentice would start the session by singing one or two episodes or some short love lyrics so that the people came to join the gathering. When the gathering would be large enough, the senior *pahlawān* would start singing. At about 11 pm, or a little later, the gathering would be complete. The master singer would then begin the formal session which would continue till the day break, or when

⁴⁰ He said he had also invited *pahlawān* Hāšum to his hometown in Nalēṅ for some time and memorized some poems from him during his stay there.

⁴¹ Writing on the singers of tales (i.e. epic singers) from former Yugoslavia, Albert Lord states that “we must eliminate from the word ‘performer’ any notion that he is one who merely reproduces what someone else or even he himself has composed.... Our singer of tales is a composer of tales. Singer, performer, composer, and poet are one under different respects *but at the same time*. Singing, performing, composing are facets of the same act” (Lord 1960: 13, italics in the original).

It is on the contrary with Baloch epic singers. Here the performer is just a transmitter of something someone else has already composed. It is memorized to him and he will be expected to reproduce it with as much accuracy as human memory may permit. As most of these ballads would also be known to a good number of people among the audience, they would never tolerate a *pahlawān* singing them wrong (for more on this see Badalkhan 2002).

the caller of prayers called for the early morning prayers. Usually, there would be no singing sessions during the day time as days were reserved for work and nights for entertainment but on some special occasions, singing sessions would also be organized during the day time and same would be the process to follow.

Once he got the okay from his teacher, he started performing on his own. But before he could claim to be a proper *pahlawān*, he went to Koṣkalāt⁴² and furthered his knowledge on the art of singing from the people there. At the age of about 18, he then joined *pahlawān* Faiz Mahmād, one of the greatest masters of the second half of the 20th century. He stayed with him for quite a long time. On the fourth year of his rigorous apprenticeship, he said he became a full-fledged *pahlawān*.

I conclude the present discussion with a few words with which our informant had begun his 1991 interview. He explained to me why he and his contemporary *pahlawāns* were disappointed and why no new epic singer was emerging.⁴³ Here is what he said:

⁴² A village in *tehsil* Turbat. *Pahlawān* Baššām also said the same saying that Koṣkalāt and Bāhō-Daštiārī (Iranian Makran) were the test ground for any *pahlawān* from Makran (in Faqīr Šād 2017c: 40; also the interview of *pahlawān* Qādirād Qāduk, in Faqīr Šād 2017b: 19).

⁴³ I know of one young *pahlawān*, named Mullā Sāleh from Dašt in district Kēč. He is in his 50s. He has got an exceptionally good voice and an excellent singing style similar to those of the past famous *pahlawāns*. He has mastered the art from *pahlawān* Baššām, one among the best epic singers of his times. If patronized and encouraged, Mullā Sāleh could become a new Faiz Mahmād Baloch, the legendary *pahlawān* of the second half of the 20th century whose studentship is considered a winning card for any *pahlawān* of the late 20th century. But, alas, *pahlawān* Sāleh is almost completely neglected, and while modern singers of love lyrics receive about one to 1.5 million rupees a single night, depending upon the social position of a host, Mullā Sāleh is hardly invited for any wedding ceremony. And when he is, the audience hardly throw any money upon him so his earning is limited to the compensation of the host of a ceremony while modern singers receive almost all of their money from the audience who generously shower bank notes upon them as a gesture of appreciation for a song and its singer. I have met and interviewed Mullā Sāleh on two occasions: once in Dašt in 1989 and again in Turbat in 2004. He has impressed me the most with his melodious voice and singing style. He admitted to me that his repertoire is not rich and he does not sing on demand or in competition with other famous *pahlawāns*. There are some younger *pahlawāns* from Iranian Makran, such as *pahlawān* Ismāel Kōsag from Daštiārī (in his 50s) and *pahlawān* Ishāq Mazār from Chabahar but they too are not duly patronized and encouraged

May izzat marčī yakk čōnāēn sotīay kaddā (ham) na int. (H)amē sotī (ki) na yakk šarrēn tārīkī gappē kant o nān āi tōkā šarrēn balōčī adab o šarāpatē zāhir būttag. Nūn ā šapā ki mārā šumay waṛēn sarpadīēn mardumē ki bārt o loṭānīt ki man Mazār yā Baššām yā diga šāirē loṭāēntag, yakkē nazzikkā naayt. Aṛay sōčē, šāirē, čē wā wā kant. (H)amā habaray jindā sarpad na bant. Marčīēn kasān pāṭī tālīmāy wāhund int. Sārīay pasay čārēnōk būttag ant, ā nazāntkār būttag ant, bali hamā wahdā šāhirārā čīnkas kadr būttag. Marčī mardumārā apsōz int ki īnkadā zāntkārāy tahā šāirārā kadr hičč nēst. Nūn hamīšīay tōkā mā ham dilprōšēn.

Today, we are not even treated equal to a simple *sotī*.⁴⁴ A *sotī* who cannot even talk of a simple historical event or knows of any Balochi etiquettes and decorum. Now, (the situation is that) when we are invited by a cultured person like you, and announce that you have invited Mazār, Baššām or another performer, (no one) will show up, saying, “forget about him, he is a *šāir*,⁴⁵ he will howl only”. (The point is that) they do not understand what we sing about. Today’s younger generation is the generation of education, those of the past were shepherds (i.e., simple person), they were ignorant. But in those days the *šayr* singer was highly esteemed. One feels very sorry that among so many learned persons, a *šayr* singer has no importance. Now, because of this, we are disheartened.

When I asked him about the reasons of this apathy and indifference towards the *pahlawāns*, he replied that “it was because of the ignorance, be-

so they are not active enough to keep the centuries old minstrelsy tradition alive. Both of them were present at the program to honour *pahlawān* Mazār on March 8, 2019 at Gwadar. It is to add that *pahlawān* Ismāel is the son of famous *pahlawān* Abdul Karīm who was the minstrel of Sardār Sayad Khān (see above n. 38).

⁴⁴ *Sotīs* are singers of short love songs, called *sot*. They basically come from the low social background. There are both male and female *sotīs* but the majority were female in the past and probably it was basically a female activity. Because of the social class of these singers, and the frivolous love contents of *sot* songs, the *sotīs* have not got the respect and place in society that they deserve. In fact, when the profession of singing love lyrics is adopted by the true blood Baloch, they call themselves *gwašīnda* (lit. “the one who says”), and not *sotī* for similar reasons. It is to add that the term *gwašīnda* was introduced during the second half of the 20th century when the profession of singing love lyrics was also adopted by upper class Baloch.

⁴⁵ He is using here the word *šāir* with the meaning of a *pahlawān*.

cause their mind (*rūh*) has gone to other sides. Their mind has turned to English and Urdu, and not to Balochi”.

He also complained about the lack of sponsorship and patronage from the state institutions. Complaining about the discriminatory attitude of state-run Radio and Television stations toward Baloch singers and musicians, he told me that presently there are three state radio stations in Balochistan: one in Quetta, one in Turbat and one in Khuzdar, and one state television station in Quetta. “They have invited me several times to make recordings but they do not even pay me my travel expenses. They expect me to travel on my own expenses and make recordings for them. How can I afford travelling to Quetta or Khuzdar on my own expenses? It is for similar reasons that we are dishearten (*dilprōš*)”, he concluded (from the 1991 interview).

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FIGURES (PLATES II-IV)

Fig. 1. *Pahlawān* Mazār singing *šayr* for the author in Nalēṭ, Gwadar, 1991 (photo by the author).

Fig. 2. Family members of *pahlawān* Mazār. All musicians. Photo by the author, Nalēṭ, 1991.

Fig. 3. *Pahlawān* Mazār performing at Government Degree College, Turbat, 1995 (photo by the author)

Fig. 4. The invitation card sent to me by the Balochi Music Promoters' Society (BMPS) to attend the music programme in honour of the legendary living *pahlawān*. The programme was held in Gwadar on March 8, 2019.

Figs. 5-6. People attending the *šayr* singing session at Gwadar organized by the BMPS on March 8, 2019 to pay tribute to *pahlawān* Mazār (photo through social media). He was aged and sick and did not perform himself but a number of other *pahlawāns* performed to their best the whole night.